

# Iron Workers and Farm Labourers

nineteenth century migration  
in two Staffordshire villages

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by  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Information from the 1871 census enumerators' books for the Staffordshire villages of Swindon and Pattingham is used to compare migration patterns between iron workers and farm labourers. Occupational differences emerge with the iron workers showing a high rate of family mobility. However, the agricultural labourers in both villages have dissimilar migration patterns, indicating that migration is affected by factors other than occupation. The majority of migrants were born locally (within 10 miles of each village) and originated in other rural areas in Staffordshire, Shropshire and Worcestershire.

## **AIMS & STRATEGY**

Many people embarking on research into family history expect to find that people in the past remained in one place throughout their lives, marrying and dying in the same town or village in which they were born. However, this seems to be part of the 'Golden Age myth' of the stable family of the past. In fact, migration ("movements of individuals/families involving a permanent/semi-permanent change of domicile" (Pryce, 1994, p.5)) appears to have been a very common experience, particularly during the nineteenth century (Pooley & Turnbull, 1994), and this topic will be the focus of my report.

I will use a 'questioning sources' strategy to compare and contrast migration patterns in order to answer the question 'To what extent did migration experience vary with occupation during the mid-nineteenth century?'

This will involve a study of two areas, analysing the similarities and differences between two occupational groups, namely the iron workers of Swindon and the agricultural labourers of Pattingham, two small villages in south Staffordshire, close to the county's boundaries with Shropshire and Worcestershire. The villages are about 6 miles apart and both are approximately 6 miles from Wolverhampton.

## **THE WORK OF OTHER RESEARCHERS**

Although migration has been a subject investigated by academics, much research appears to have focused on general trends or specific localities rather than on the impact of occupation. In 1983 Turner commented that "there have been few attempts to look at the [migration] patterns for specific occupational groups" and it would seem that little has changed over the subsequent 10 years (Turner, 1983, p.28).

I have experienced some difficulty in identifying research into the links between occupation and migration. A search of the British Humanities Index 1987-1994 resulted in only a handful of articles explicitly mentioning migration and occupation. Only one of these appeared to concern agricultural labourers (Finch, 1987) and one article included iron workers (White, 1988). There is also a brief mention of the migration patterns of iron workers in an article about long-distance migrants in the glass industry (Jackson, 1982).

Most of the references I have found concerning agricultural communities appear to focus almost exclusively on patterns of out-migration to urban areas. A search of a bibliographic database containing the Social Sciences Citation Index revealed a number of articles relating to agricultural communities, but almost all considered either modern studies in developing countries or rural-urban migration.

A useful study is Martin White's investigation into migration in Grantham and Scunthorpe. In this he seeks to move from the assumption that migrants were young

and single and place migration in the context of the family (White, 1988). Scunthorpe was dependent on the iron industry and, therefore, part of White's research relates to the migration patterns of iron workers and their families. He discovered that those working in the iron industry demonstrated a greater tendency for family migration than those in other occupations and it will be interesting to establish if this pattern is repeated in the migration experience of the iron workers of Swindon.

There is currently a research project in progress at Lancaster University into the analysis of migration in the past. Using data from family historians and genealogists in Lancashire and Cumbria, the project aims to address questions about where and why people moved and about the effect of migration on places, families and individuals (Pooley & Turnbull, 1994).

The preliminary results indicate an average of four moves per person, mainly within the local region (Ibid., p.292). The authors note that the migration system was not dominated by moves to large towns and rural to urban migration and that many people moved within the countryside, between towns and even from urban areas back to the countryside. Given the proximity of the two villages I will be studying to the industrial towns of the Black Country, there may be similar evidence of this urban to rural movement in my research.

Some work has been undertaken into population movements in the West Midlands based on the nineteenth century census enumerators' books (CEBs). Lawton indicates the population distribution in the Midland counties of Staffordshire, Warwickshire and Worcestershire during the period 1841-61, noting the increase in population and the drift from rural to urban areas. Although he does not comment in detail on occupation, he records that there were links with other industrial towns in the north which acted both as sending and receiving communities for migrants to and from the Black Country (Lawton, 1958).

### **SOURCES & METHODS**

The main source used in this project will be the CEBs for 1871. It was fairly straightforward to determine the CEB entries to use for Swindon which, at that time, formed part of an enumeration district in the parish of Wombourne, Staffordshire. However, it was more difficult for Pattingham, which was itself a parish and included a number of surrounding hamlets. The whole parish covered three enumeration districts, and comprised two townships. In order to compare like with like, the choice was either to use data for the whole of the parishes of Pattingham and Wombourne or for only the respective villages of Pattingham and Swindon. The latter was chosen as providing a more manageable data pool within the limits of the current project.

As I have access to a microcomputer, it seemed worthwhile to input data from the CEBs to a database in order to aid the extraction of information on the specific

occupations. After a brief evaluation I decided to use a flat database package, Cardbox Plus, which I had already used to design simple databases, rather than use relational database software with which I was unfamiliar. It seemed that the flat database structure would be adequate for the needs of the current report as the main purpose of computerising the data was to improve processing speeds and enable rapid combinations of searches, e.g. a search for the number of married migrant iron workers would take only a few seconds by computer, in contrast to the time necessary to sort manually through the data.

Once I had decided which software to use, it was a simple matter to determine the fields of the database as the information contained in the CEBs is so highly structured. After considering the drawbacks of omitting some of the CEB information from the database (Drake & Finnegan, 1994, p.210), I decided to include all information except for the names of individuals and details of disabilities. As the data to be analysed will be concerned with general patterns and trends rather than specific individuals and nominal record linkage, the omission of names is not a significant problem.

The remainder of the data from the CEBs has been entered exactly, although I have added a very basic occupational code to distinguish agricultural labourers and iron workers from the rest of the population. As these are the only occupations to be studied it seemed unnecessary to employ any socio-economic groupings.

The decision to concentrate only on the inhabitants of the individual villages themselves rather than the whole of the parishes, means that there is no need for sampling and the entire populations can be used.

Much of my research involves the retrieval of information from the database on ratios and proportions e.g. the proportion of farm workers who were migrants, and will not involve the extensive use of quantitative techniques outlined in the course texts (Drake & Finnegan, 1994, pp.175-201).

The CEBs are an invaluable tool for the study of migration, recording birth place information for every individual listed (except for the 1841 census). However, the main drawback is that they only record lifetime migration - the difference between a person's place of birth and place of enumeration on census night. This may, of course, bear little relationship to an individual's migration history as much unrecorded movement could have taken place in the interim period.

The birthplaces of co-resident children can be used to help expand information on migration patterns and paths taken but this still results in a somewhat crude measurement. No conclusive information, apart from lifetime migration, is available for single people, childless couples or families whose children have left home. For these groups it is impossible to tell from the CEBs, unless co-resident siblings are present, at what age migration to the receiving community may have taken place and which migration paths were taken.



The data for those families with co-resident children may also not accurately reflect a family's migration history as the age-spacing of children may be too wide or there may not be enough children to show the full pattern of movement (Gwynne & Sill, 1976, pp.74-5).

The census, of course, also shows only those who have moved in and remained - there is no record of short-term migrants during the intercensal period. White also points out that merely because a migrant family is recorded as co-resident on census night, it does not necessarily mean that all members of the family unit migrated at the same time (White, 1988, p.42).

I have encountered few problems with the information in the CEBs. There have been some cases where the relationship to the head of the household appears to have been inaccurately recorded, e.g. 'brother' instead of 'brother in law'. The main disadvantage for my research, however, is in the CEBs for Swindon which record the place of birth for those born in the village as 'Wombourne' rather than 'Swindon'. This means that it will not be possible to establish the number of people who moved to Swindon from their birthplace in Wombourne. However, this is not likely to be a significant problem in analysing the sending communities of migrants as the villages are only about 1 mile apart.

Although only a snapshot of the situation on census night, the CEBs are the only source available from which migration details, however crude, can be ascertained for individuals and families across the whole country.

### **MIGRATION PATTERNS IN SWINDON AND PATTINGHAM**

	SWINDON	PATTINGHAM
TOTAL POPULATION	343	420
NO. OF MIGRANTS (%)	189 (55.1%)	165 (39.3%)

**Table 1. Proportion of migrants in the population, 1871**

Table 1 shows a marked difference between the villages in the number of people who, on census night 1871, were not resident in the place of their birth. The figure for Swindon compares with Michael Anderson's finding that well under half the population on census night 1851 were still resident in their place of birth (Anderson, 1983, reprinted in Drake, 1994, p.68). In contrast, it appears that Pattingham received considerably fewer migrants than might have been expected.

Tables 2 and 3 indicate that both iron workers and agricultural workers had less tendency to migrate than other occupational groups in each village, but agricultural workers appear to have been far more likely to remain in the place of their birth than were iron workers.

	MIGRANTS
IRON WORKERS	51%
NON-IRON WORKERS	61%

**Table 2. Male migrants (aged 14 or over) by occupation, Swindon 1871**

	MIGRANTS
FARM WORKERS	40%
NON-FARM WORKERS	45%

**Table 3. Male migrants (aged 14 or over) by occupation, Pattingham 1871**

It has been said that "mobility was almost a cultural trait" among nineteenth century iron workers (White, 1988, p.48) and this would appear to be true of those in Swindon in 1871. Of the 47 males who were listed in the CEBs as working in the iron trade, 24 (51%) were migrants.

However, Swindon, although dominated by the iron industry, also contained a number of farm workers and it is interesting to compare the migration of this occupational group with the same group in Pattingham.

	MIGRANTS
FARM WORKERS	53%
NON-FARM WORKERS	58%

**Table 4. Male migrants (aged 14 or over) by occupation, Swindon 1871**

Tables 3 and 4 clearly show that farm workers in Swindon were considerably more mobile than those in Pattingham and, in fact, slightly more mobile than the Swindon iron workers. Thus, it appears that occupation was not the only factor affecting migration. It seems that the migration patterns of a particular occupational group in a particular area may bear more similarities to the general migration patterns of the locality than to those in the same occupation elsewhere.

These results require further examination of the CEBs to establish if there are any significant differences between the occupational groups in the two villages. The 24 migrant iron workers of Swindon were predominantly young, with a median age of 34 - only 3 were over the age of 50. In contrast, the 16 migrant agricultural labourers in Swindon had a median age of 51 - only 5 were under the age of 40. This may indicate that migrants who originally moved to the village as iron workers became farm labourers as they grew older which would not be surprising given the physical demands of the iron trade.

The farm labourers of Pattingham, on the other hand, had a median age of 39. The full age range was 15-76, indicating a greater continuity of occupation over the life cycle. Unlike Swindon, there was no major alternative employment in the village except for those apprenticed to a particular trade.

Economic factors may also have encouraged a move from the iron trade to other employment. It may be that the decline in the Black Country iron industry at this time

(Birch 1967, pp.133-4, 155-7) forced former iron workers to find alternative employment on the land.

Martin White comments that family migration is more evident amongst iron workers in Scunthorpe than amongst other occupational groups in the town (White, 1988) and Jackson also reports that a "surprising number of migrant iron workers to Middlesborough were family men who had moved several times between iron-making centres in the course of their families' life cycles" (Jackson, 1982, p.115). This would appear to be a common trait among workers in the iron trade and is certainly confirmed by the migration patterns of those in Swindon. Table 5 shows that of the 18 households headed by a married, male, migrant ironworker, 55.5% were family movers.

There appears to be a much larger proportion of family movers among the iron workers, although this is not conclusive owing to the large number of non-iron workers' families in the 'intermediate' category. This category consists of migrant married couples with no co-resident children or with co-resident children born in Swindon/Wombourne.

	IRON WORKERS	NON-IRON WORKERS
<b>Native wife</b> (i.e. husband assumed to have arrived alone)	16.7%	13.6%

<b>'Intermediate'</b> (migrant wife with no co-resident migrant children)	27.8%	50%
<b>'Family mover'</b> (migrant wife, migrant co-resident children)	55.5%	36.4%

Table 5. Migrant category of married migrant males with co-resident wives, Swindon 1871

Analysis of migration patterns for married males in Pattingham (Table 6) indicates noticeable differences between agricultural labourers and those in other occupations. It would appear that no families with a farm worker as head migrated to Pattingham as a family unit, compared to 25% of non-farm workers in the village and 55.5% of iron workers in Swindon. However, this may be misleading as the vast majority of agricultural labourers in Pattingham belonged to the inconclusive 'intermediate' category where both husband and wife were migrants but the household contained no co-resident migrant children on census night.

	FARMWORKERS	NON-FARMWORKERS
<b>Native wife</b> (i.e. husband assumed to have arrived alone)	30.8%	35%
<b>'Intermediate'</b> (migrant wife with no co-resident migrant children)	69.2%	40%
<b>'Family mover'</b> (migrant wife, migrant co-resident children)	0%	25%

Table 6. Migrant category of married migrant males with co-resident wives, Pattingham 1871

Further research is needed to examine previous census returns and use nominal record linkage techniques to determine how many of these 'intermediate' families arrived as family migrants but whose migrant children had left home by the time of the 1871 census.

The high proportion of family movers among the Swindon iron workers may be due to the general low age of marriage which "was a national characteristic of iron workers" (White, 1988, p.48). This appears to be confirmed by the smaller percentage of migrant husbands in Swindon who married native wives (16.7%) compared with the farm labourers in Pattingham (30.8%). The indication is that a greater proportion of farm labourers than iron workers arrived as single males and subsequently married native females.

Pattingham's migrants originated mainly from the immediate surrounding area with 61.2% of the total number of migrants being born locally (i.e. within a 10 mile radius of the village). Although most of Swindon's migrants were also local (56.4%), a slightly smaller proportion of the iron workers were born within 10 miles of the village (52.4%). A comparison of migrant farm labourers shows that in both villages exactly the same proportion originated locally (66.7%) which is consistent with the finding that iron workers generally showed a greater tendency for long-distance movement (Jackson, 1982, p.115).

Examination of the details of the sending communities supports Ravenstein's 'law' that long distance migrants generally go to one of the great centres of commerce or industry (Pryce, 1994, p.11). Almost all of the migrant iron workers and farm labourers in both villages were born in Staffordshire or the neighbouring counties of Shropshire and Worcestershire and there is no evidence of any chain migration within these occupational groups.

In both villages the majority of migrant farm labourers and iron workers were born in rural areas. Rather surprisingly, none of the migrant iron workers were born in Wolverhampton or the other major manufacturing areas of the Black Country.

## **CONCLUSION**

It appears that occupation has an important role to play in the migration patterns of individuals and families. The 'national traits' of a high rate of mobility and a greater tendency of family migration among iron workers (White, 1988) are also clearly evident in the migration patterns of those in Swindon.

However, occupation at the time of the census cannot be the only factor affecting migration as, if this were so, the farm labourers of Pattingham and Swindon would have similar migration histories. It may be that the agricultural labourers of Swindon were previously employed in the iron trade and, therefore, shared more migration characteristics with the iron workers of Swindon than the farm labourers of



Pattingham. Further research involving nominal record linkage methods may indicate whether this change of occupation, in fact, took place.

The migration patterns of both villages confirm Pooley and Turnbull's preliminary findings that most moves were relatively short distance and within the local area (Pooley & Turnbull, 1994, p.292).

My initial interest in the two villages was prompted by family history research, branches of my family being iron workers and farm labourers in the area. The most interesting aspect of the project for me has been the discovery of more general trends in the communities which set my own family history into a wider context. The strength of the open-endedness of the 'questioning sources' approach (Finnegan & Drake, 1994, p.1), although enabling greater flexibility within the examination of sources, leaves a host of unasked questions. Given the constraints of the current report, if I were to do the project again I would seriously consider using the alternative hypothesis testing approach.

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